SECTION THREE

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A DEAD ONE.

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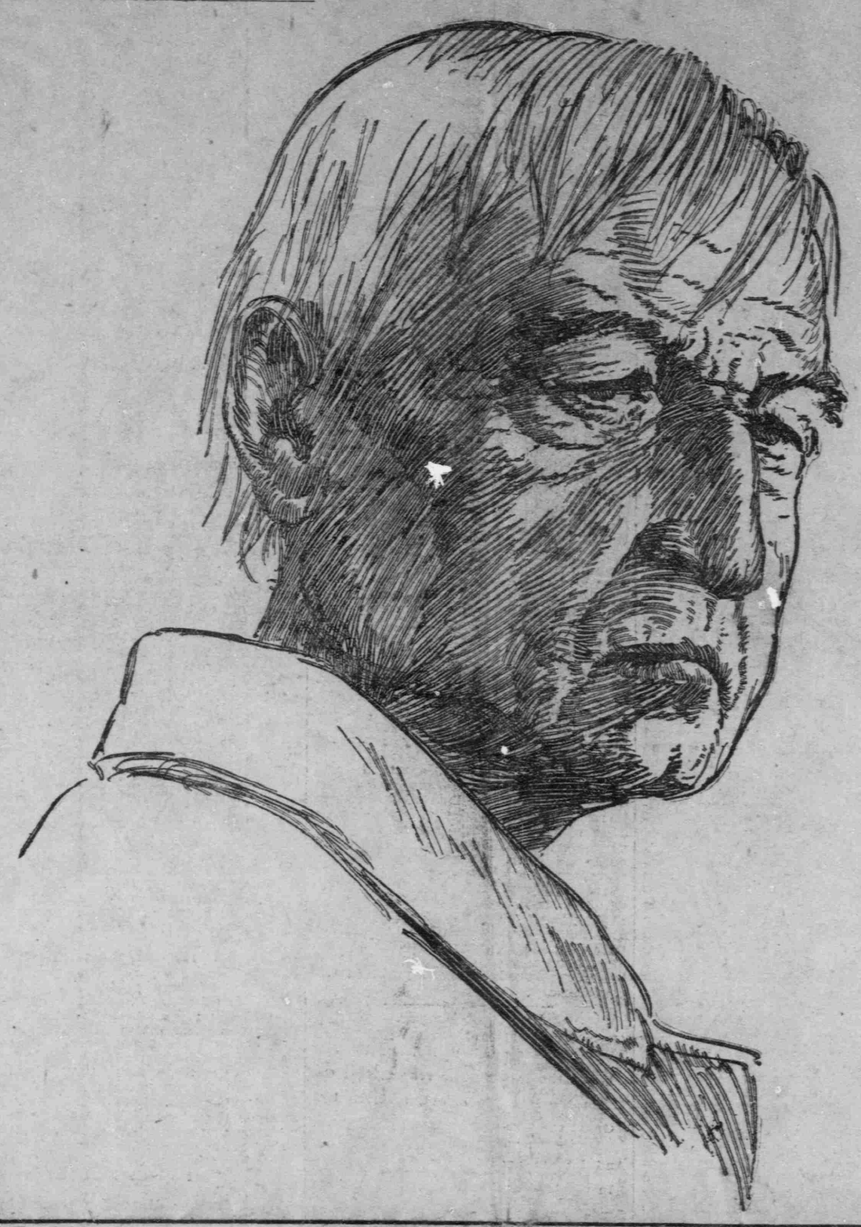

A TRAMP camps in the United States a favorite topic for discussion is the whereabouts of Barnard Carr. He was never a great celebrity in the sense that he had become noted for a mastery in some one branch of Under-World skill; but he was considered by the "perfesh" and the Powers That Rule a remarkably clever "all-round" man. Hoboes liked him because, as they put it, he was not "stuck on himself." It was his custom when in luck—and for ten years he seemed to be always in luck—to visit them at their hangouts, and hoboes have always admired a crook who was sufficiently independent not to fear loss of caste on being seen in their company.

One of the present scribes met Carr while he was at the top of his reputation, at a tramp camp in Pennsylvania. It was at night, and a circle of men and boys were lounging about a great fire, with the dome of the stars for a tent and selected railway ties for campchairs and cots. On a tie apart, a tie of state, sat a well-dressed stranger, who was obviously the guest of the evening. His stylish garb, white hands and polite manner were evidence enough that he was no ordinary traveler of the "road."

Newcomers at the camp were not left long in ignorance of the man's identity. The scribe had hardly taken a seat on one of the ties when a lad at his side nudged him and said in an awe-struck whisper: "That's Carr, the great perfesh'nul." A heathen could not have directed attention to one of his deities with more reverence. The man seemed to be oblivious of the regard in which he was held by the camp. His eyes were fixed on the fire, and he spoke only occasionally. He had little to say about himself, and answered questions in monosyllables. When he got up to leave he dropped a $10 bill on the tie, saying: "Wet 'er up on me, boys," and disappeared up the track.

The tramps commented on his career and personality after he had gone.

"How that bloke holds out!" one exclaimed. "If he's done a day in the Pen, he's done fifteen years. He's got the nerve; you can't see a sign of weakenin' in him. Benanged 'f I can explain it."

"He'll go to pieces all of a sudden some day," another declared. "You see 'f he don't. There's men like that; they don't crack nor bend, they bust. We'll see him here on the turf yet. I tell you, the bloke don't live that can take stretchers in the Pen the way Carr has, an' not bust. 'Tain't in human nature. 'Course he's holdin' out longer'n some; he's nervy an 's got good health, but I gamble coin he'll be hittin' the road after a while. A crook's built like other folks, an' can't live on nerve forever."

"They say 't he's salted down a big pile for old age, all the same," a westerner remarked. "'Frisco Blackie told me the other day that Carr was one o' the richest crooks in the country."

"Rich in your eye," sneered an old man from Chicago. "I'll bet Carr don't salt down anythin' from one year's end to the other. Crooks ain't bankers; what the devil's the matter with you? They blow their dough as fast as they get it, and right, too. Some lawyer or front-office stiff 'ud cop it out if they saved it up. I'll bet Carr ain't got over ten thousand put past, an' he'll spend all o' that prob'ly the next time he's pinched. I tell you it's the fly cops an' lawyers that get the crooks' coin. I ain't heard of a chief in a big city that didn't retire, as they call it, with his pockets full of dough. Them's the blokes that does the savin'. 'Tain't the crook."

"What about Detroit Fraxy an' his blocks of houses?" asked a kid.

"Detroit Fraxy—you make me tired! He'll lose 'em. He'll get in a hole some day an' have to cough 'em up them houses. Look at Carr. He had one o' the best payin' gamblin' joints in 'Frisco four years ago; he had to deed it over to his lawyer fer chewin' the rag fer 'im in that murder scrape. It's all right 'bout crooks makin' dough, but it's holdin' of it that counts. God never yet made a crook that has stuck to the gratt long, takin' chances an' stretchers, an' come out rich."

The hang-out broke up soon after this statement, and the men took trains in different directions.

During the following five years the scribe saw Carr twice and heard of him once. On both occasions when he saw Carr the man was apparently still in luck. He was dressed well, had money "to burn," was courted by his companions, and had no complaint to make beyond the statement that he felt that he was getting old.

"Had a year to do in Alabama not leng ago," he explained at the second meeting, "and the Stir was so damp that my bones got wet. I don't mind when they give me steam heat in my cell, but it rather uses me up otherwise. A fellow gets cranky, you know, after he's been shut up a good deal. As a kid I didn't give a damn where they put me, but the guards get all my money now for things 't I think I got to have. That's about the only thing 't I keep a bank account for—to get priv'leges when the pinch comes. And do you know I don't feel comf'table any more in a large room. I ain't done such a hell of a lot o' time compared with some blokes, but I been livin' in cells off an' on for the las' sixteen years, an' I've got so used to 'em 't I always ask for a small room now when I go to a hotel. I have enough dough sometimes to pay for a whole suite, as they call it, but I wouldn't feel right in one. Give me a chair, a washstand, an' six feet to stretch out in, an' old Carr's happy as the rest of 'em. I tell you, pard, on the level, the Pen does change you. I'm sure 't I'd been a bigger man 'f I hadn't been cooped up so much. Didn't no more'n begin to grow than I got pinched, an' I ain't had a fightin' chance to grow since."

"Your nerve's all right, isn't it?" the scribe asked.

"It's all right so far, but you never know when it'll go back on you. I'm goin' to try an' put past a stake before long for old age. I'm bound to weaken after a while, an' I ought to have a bank account to live on. 'Bout five years more'll see me settled down, I guess. I ought to plant a good swag by that time. 'Course it'll be hard to chuck the business, but you got to cool down a little when you're gettin' shaky on your pins, an' I'd rather like to die easy. God knows, I've lived hard!"

About two years after this conversation there appeared in a western newspaper an account of Carr's arrest for an offense committed on the coast. It read thus: "Barnard Carr, alias Cincie Shorty, was arrested by the local police last night. The details of his crime have not yet come in, but there is no doubt in the minds of the police that Carr is the man wanted. The dispatch from —— said that one of the local banks had been 'taken in' by a forged check calling for $15,000, and the description of the alleged forger fits Carr exactly. The man has one of the longest police blotter records in this country. He has operated with one 'graft' and another in practically every state of the Union, and is not unknown in Mexico. On account of his neat appearance and unobtrusive manner, he is sometimes called 'The Gentleman Crook,' but he fraternizes with tramps as well as professional criminals. He is reported to take crime as seriously as an artist takes his art, and the neat 'jobs' that he has planned and done bear out the report. The sheriff states that he was welcomed by the other prisoners in the jail as a most distinguished personage. He is said to be very popular among criminals of all classes. If guilty of the crime for which he has been arrested, the probability is that he will be given a severe sentence. Carr has employed the best counsel in the city, and a telegram has been sent to the famous criminal lawyer, Ames, in 'Frisco."

Six months later the Under World was notified that Barnard Carr had received eight years.

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A short time ago two scribes were taking a stroll in Lime street, Liverpool. At night it is one of the most instructive promenades in England for a man who wishes to know things; and one can complete investigations that have been begun in "the main stem" of towns thousands of miles away. The four continents contribute to the life on the pavement, as well as in the places of entertainment, and the passersby and performers jabber in many tongues and dialects.

The scribes drifted into a "free and easy," where men and women sing songs and then pass their hats and bonnets around for pennies and ha'pennies. It was a sordid little place with a smell in it that was composed of all smells of neglect, tobacco and alcohol. Any one in the audience who had a voice and a song, or thought he had, might take the floor and put his opinion to the test of popularity.

On the evening in question there had been a lull in the proceedings, and to break it the master of ceremonies turned to a shabbily dressed little man sitting alone near the piano player.

"Barnie, you little tramp, are you sober enough to give us a song?" he asked. "There's a good 'ouse tonight, an' you'll get a swag if you let 'er run right."

Barnie gave the "'ouse" the old jail song of the Boston burglar, which runs:

I was brought up in Boston,
A place you all know well;
Brought up by honest parents,
And now I've gone to hell;
But my character was taken,
I had to hit the trail;
And his honor he shoved me into jail!

The song was none of the best, and the man's voice was cracked and the piano player knew but little of the tune, but the audience cried, "'Ear, 'ear!" and clapped, and Barnie's hat was well lined with copper. The collection finished, he took a seat near the scribes.

"I ain't much on the melojous howl," he said, with a significant grin, "but I can toss off a glass o' somethin' hot. I guess you fellows is Yanks, ain't you?"

He was told that he had guessed right.

"Thought so. What'll you take?—on me! Can't give you sham, but I'm good for anythin' in reason."

"You're a Yank yourself, aren't you?" one of the scribes queried when the drinks had been bought.

"Well that's as may be."

"Name's Carr, isn't it?"

The little vagrant gave both scribes a searching look.

"Who are you blokes? D' I know you?"

One of the scribes reminded him of previous meetings in the "States."

"Well, I'll be hanged! Say, come down to my hang-out, will you? You've paid for this stuff; I'll get some booze an' a candle, an' we'll chew the rag. There's a lot I want to know about old times."

We left the "free and easy" and Barnie led the way toward the docks. He insisted on purchasing some beer and a candle in a shop in the last street before turning into a maze of murky alleyways, and then guided us to a great barrel or hogshead, hidden away among broken boxes, discarded ship timbers and assorted debris.

"'Tain't no parlor car, pals," he explained, lighting the candle and setting it in a tin socket in the barrel, "but it fits me, an' that's all I want. Will you sit outside or come in? Can't all get in, that's sure!"

The air was stagnant and warm to the touch, and even in the open the lungs labored. We sat on some planks outside. It was some time before Barnie's talk turned naturally upon himself; he kept asking about this pal and that pal, how things were "coming up over home," who were still holding out in the "perfesh," who had gone under, which "coppers" were in power, which "stirs" were easy or hard, what good "touches" had been made lately, who were "settled" and who free, and about various other things connected with the life on which his imagination still dwelt with a certain pride. At last, however, when the scribes had answered his queries as best they could, he said suddenly:

"I s'pose you want to hear my rag-chewer now?"

The scribes smiled and nodded. The little man's shoulders twitched, he took a fresh piece of "snipe" from his pocket, bowed his head for a moment as if ashamed, looked up again, and began:

"It's none too nice to tell; but you blokes has known me when I was top of the heap and you will understand. 'Course I could 'a' croaked myself, an' the whole thing 'ud 'a' been off, but the fact is I didn't have even nerve enough for that. That last stretcher on the coast dreaned me out. They used me hard, that's where it is, an' I didn't make any good time either. I basted a guard for callin' me a liar, an' the warden didn't remember to forgit it. They tucked me away in the dungeon ten times just for luck like. I had a few thousand when they turned me loose, but I spent 'em travelin'. I thought I'd brace up, p'r'aps, 'f I got a change, so I came over here, an' for a while I drifted all over the shop. If my dough 'ud 'a' held out I'd be on the mooch yet, I guess. I only had twenty pounds when I got back to London, but my nerve was no good, an' I tried for a job on the level, but 'twasn't no use. A bloke that's used up for swipin' ain't up to no kind o' work, good or bad.

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